

# DECLARATION

OF THE OBJECTS OF

## THE LIVERPOOL SOCIETY

FOR PROMOTING

### The Abolition of Slavery,

25TH MARCH, 1823.

---

LIVERPOOL,

Printed by James Smith:

PUBLISHED BY HATCHARD & SON, PICCADILLY, AND J. & J. ARCH,  
CORNHILL, LONDON;

SOLD BY W. GRAPEL CHURCH-STREET, AND G. & J. ROBINSON,  
CASTLE-STREET, LIVERPOOL.

*At a Meeting of the LIVERPOOL SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY, the 25th day of March, 1823, the following Declaration of the objects of this Society was adopted, and ordered to be printed.*

---

**T**HE present age is remarkable beyond any that has preceded it, for the rapid and surprising improvement which has taken place in the moral character and disposition of mankind, by which they have been enabled to take new views, and obtain more correct ideas of their rights and their duties, both relative and positive; and to diffuse more extensively over the world, the principles of justice, charity, and peace.

This improvement is in a great measure the result of a discovery, of which former times seem not to have been aware. It is true, efforts have been made by wise and good men in almost every age, to enlighten and improve mankind; but these have been confined to individual instances, and have in general been devoted to the propagation of opinions only, in which each individual is in some degree at variance with every other; but the discovery to which we allude, is the practice of combining society itself in intellectual masses, for the purpose of obtaining some certain, defined, and acknowledged good, which is generally allowed to be essential to the well-being of the whole.

Nor has this discovery been suffered to remain useless or inactive; on the contrary, it has already been employed with great effect, and in no country more successfully than in our own; where we already perceive its happy results

in the moral condition and intellectual improvement of the community, every class of which is evidently rising in the scale of rational beings.

Scarcely indeed is there a subject which affects more particularly the vital interests and welfare of mankind, that has not of late years attracted the notice of great and respectable bodies of the people; by whose united inquiries, deliberations, and exertions, objects of the highest importance have been obtained, which never could have been accomplished by other means. Amongst these may be enumerated the various establishments for the education of youth on rational and enlightened principles; the highly laudable and efficacious attempts to disseminate throughout the world the pure and unadulterated principles of Christianity, by rendering the sacred volume accessible to all; the earnest endeavours to eradicate vice and wretchedness from their strong holds and last retreats, by penetrating the prison-gloom, and holding forth to the despairing criminal the hope of mercy and the means of restoration; and lastly, the inculcating on all ranks of society, just, correct and impartial views of the relative rights and privileges of human beings; thereby exciting an abhorrence of tyranny, an indignation against cruelty, a sympathy and commiseration for the injured, and a sincere and virtuous desire of considering the claims of others as well as our own, of judging them with singleness of heart, and of “doing to others as we would they should do to us.”

How far the last of these purposes has been carried into practical effect, may be inferred from a single circumstance;—the deep and universal feeling which has for some time past been excited in these kingdoms, against the continuance, in our Colonies, of Negro slavery, and the abominable traffic which was deemed necessary to its support. The time is yet within the memory of persons not far advanced

in life, when this traffic was not only considered as allowable, but was sanctioned by the voice of the community, and carried on under public encouragement and legislative authority; notwithstanding which, such was the change that had taken place in the moral feelings of the people, and such the general indignation against the continuance of this cruel traffic, that it was abolished by the universal and almost unanimous act of the British nation; thereby exhibiting the most memorable instance that the world had ever seen, of the triumph of virtuous principle; and affording the strongest encouragement to persevere in a course of proceeding productive of such truly gratifying results.

It is true, this signal effort to remove one of the greatest evils that ever afflicted mankind, has not been attended with all the beneficial consequences that were confidently expected from it; for although this iniquitous traffic has been abandoned by the British nation, it still continues to be carried on, under the authority, real or pretended, of foreign states; and perhaps to an equal extent, and with circumstances of greater cruelty and atrocity than were ever before witnessed; but this neither derogates from the virtuous efforts of those by whom this memorable victory was obtained, nor has it in the slightest degree diminished the interest which they feel in the cause of the oppressed Africans. On the contrary, the continuance of this traffic under the flag of foreign powers, and the heart-rending narratives from time to time brought before the public, of the abominations and cruelties, the murders and depredations still carried on with such unrelenting ferocity, in so great a portion of the habitable globe, have tended to increase the indignation they before felt, and to awaken in them a more earnest desire for the adoption of such measures as may repel from the shores of Africa this criminal

infraction of its just rights, and terminate an abuse which is a blot and a reproach to human nature.

For this purpose, it appears indispensably necessary to carry forward the great work already so well begun, and to direct the just and generous feelings of the British nation, and the world at large, not only against the traffic in slaves, but against *Slavery itself*; by demonstrating its dreadful and pernicious effects, as well on the master as on the slave, and even on the moral character and habits of the community at large; its peculiar inconsistency with the principles of Christianity and the avowed spirit of the British constitution, and its long suspected, and now ascertained inefficacy, as being an indispensable, or even a necessary instrument, of agricultural or commercial gain.

It is with the hope of contributing, in some degree, towards the accomplishment of so meritorious a purpose, that this Society has been formed; nor will it, we trust, be considered as an unfavourable circumstance, that such an establishment has taken place in the town of LIVERPOOL, and in the centre of that community, where, a few years since, the traffic in African slaves was carried on to a greater extent, than in any other part of the British dominions; affording in itself a decisive proof of the great change which has taken place in the moral views and feelings of the community. It must not, however, be supposed, that this Society views the conduct of those who, either in Liverpool or elsewhere, formerly carried on the trade to Africa, as different, in a moral light, from that of the government which encouraged it, and the nation which so long sanctioned its continuance, and shared its results. We can state with confidence, that the voice of the Legislature was no sooner pronounced than it was obeyed; and it is with real gratification we are enabled to testify, that there are few places in the kingdom where the slave-trade is held in greater abhorrence, than in the Town of Liverpool.

This Society is also induced to hope, that the local advantages incident to a great commercial place, and the opportunities it affords of obtaining information respecting the present state of slavery in many parts of the world, and particularly in the British Colonies, and the States of North and South America, will be found to conduce in a considerable degree to the success of their labours. With such motives and expectations, they have entered upon their task; and imploring the favour of **DIVINE PROVIDENCE**, proceed to state the motives by which they are guided, and the objects which it will be their endeavour to attain.

**THIS SOCIETY**, disavowing, in the most explicit manner, all idea of attaching to the Colonial proprietors any moral imputation, further than such as attaches also to the nation at large, which has sanctioned and encouraged the system of slavery in its foreign possessions; but entertaining a decided conviction that the period is approaching, when, from the improved state of public feeling, the consequent abhorrence so justly and universally entertained against the practice of slavery, and from the changes that are taking place in the commercial relations of the world, such system must be finally relinquished; will continue to use its best endeavours to obtain from foreign parts, and particularly from the West India Islands and America, the most extensive and correct information as to the condition and consequences of personal slavery; and will also continue to collect the most important facts as to the comparative advantages of the labour of free men and slaves, in the raising of Colonial and foreign produce, and to ascertain the result of the experiments that have been, or may be made on this subject, so as to point out the best and most efficacious methods for the progressive emancipation of slaves, and the raising them to

the condition of a peasantry, and to the state of independent and voluntary labourers; thus terminating, as speedily as possible, by all lawful and peaceable means, a cruel and degrading system, which, there is reason to believe, is no less injurious to the interests of the master, than it is unjust and oppressive to the slave, and enabling the Colonial proprietors to cultivate their plantations in a better and more effectual manner, with less inconvenience, danger, and trouble, and on more economical and advantageous terms; so as to contend, as well in the foreign as British market, with the similar productions of any other part of the earth; the only remedy which, it is apparent to common sense, can ever afford them permanent and effectual relief.

It is with this view, which unites the extinction of an odious abuse with the best interests of the Colonial proprietors, that this Society has engaged in its present labours, in the course of which it has already obtained, from various parts of the world, the most decisive proofs, not only of the dreadful effects of personal slavery, both on the objects of its cruelty and on society at large, but of the superior advantages of carrying on agricultural undertakings, of whatever nature they may be, by the labour of free men in preference to that of slaves. On this head, the facts they have already recorded on their journals afford very strong and important evidence; and they have the satisfaction to add, that many of them have been placed in a fair and impartial light, in a Tract written on this subject by a member of this Society, which will demonstrate to every unprejudiced reader the important truth for which they contend.\* To this publication they appeal with confidence for the correctness of

---

\* "A Letter to M. Jean Baptiste Say, on the comparative expense of free and slave Labour. By Adam Hodgson."—Hatchard & Son, Piccadilly, London; and W. Grapel, and G. & J. Robinson, Liverpool.—1823.

their statement ; and hesitate not, on the present occasion, to take it for granted, that the advantages which will be found to result from the adoption of free labour, with the introduction of more improved implements and more skilful modes of agriculture, will more than compensate for the difference that at present subsists in the expense of producing the articles of Colonial and foreign commerce, in the different parts where such cultivation takes place.

Under such circumstances, can it be supposed that the Colonial proprietor will be insensible to the situation in which he is placed ? Is he not aware that the same moral impulse which, sixteen years since, terminated, as far as in the power of the British nation, the traffic in human beings, is yet in action, excited and invigorated by the indignant reflection that its object has been defeated ? Can he be insensible of the indications that appear on every hand, of an approaching effort to vindicate the rights of human nature, and to extirpate the condition of personal slavery throughout the civilized world ? Can he think it possible, that governments which pride themselves on their freedom, can long submit to the reproaches, which they now pour out against each other, for sanctioning in practice the most degrading and intolerable oppression ? And will he not take measures to provide against the evils which he suffers, and the still more important change which it seems impossible for him long to avert ? Let him but open his eyes to one inveterate error, and assent to one indisputable truth, and he will be the first to adopt the proposed change, and the most earnest to carry it into full effect. Let him cease to imagine that there can be any advantage in being the holder of a slave ; and let him acknowledge that in the British Colonies, as in every other part of the inhabited world, labour will always be procured for a return sufficient to provide the labourer with the necessaries of



life. Will he affect to deny a fact now universally admitted, that the cautious economy of the freeman consumes less than the heedless profusion of the slave? Would it not be desirable, if it were possible, to be relieved from the enormous responsibility which attaches to those who hold in their hands the destiny of others; and who are obliged, under all circumstances, to provide for the existence, convenience, and support of them and their descendants? And will not the British Colonies appear to greater advantage in the eyes of their proprietors, and be held in a different estimation by the rest of the world, when they are cultivated in the manner of British farms?

But whilst this Society earnestly recommends the adoption of such system as may appear best calculated to combine the interests of the Colonists with the wishes of those who are adverse to the continuation of slavery, it must not be supposed that the principle upon which the Society is founded depends in any degree upon the result of the measures which they have thus ventured to recommend. Convinced as the Society is, from the numerous instances that have already occurred, that it is for the advantage of the Colonist to adopt a less objectionable and more improved mode of cultivation, it will endeavour to impress that conviction on those who are more immediately interested, and will afford every information in its power as to the methods adopted in different parts of the world for that purpose, and of the success with which they have been or may be attended; but this must be considered as done merely with a view to facilitate an event which the Society so earnestly wishes to see accomplished, with the least possible inconvenience to those concerned; and not as affecting, in the slightest degree, the grounds of the association of this Society, or the course which it is its determination to pursue. Its objection is to *Slavery*, under whatever plea it may be

vindicated; and if its abettors could demonstrate that the continuance of it is indispensable to their interests, and that it could not be relinquished without a great inconvenience, and a certain loss, it would not in any respect diminish the exertions of the Society, or change its views. If it should appear that the pecuniary interests of an individual or a nation cannot be advanced without a violation of the immutable principles of right and justice, this Society cannot hesitate as to the course it ought to pursue. If it be expedient that a plantation or a colony should be cultivated, it is incumbent on those who undertake it, to cultivate it by just and equitable means; or in other words, to pay to those who actually perform the labour, the price at which they estimate it; and until they can obtain labourers by these means, it is better their plantations should remain uncultivated to the end of time. The truth of this proposition is rendered evident by referring to the monstrous consequences that must ensue from its reverse, viz. that rather than a plantation or a colony should remain uncultivated, it is better to compel persons to cultivate it by force; a proposition which acknowledges no law but that of the strongest, which violates every Christian and moral duty, and which it is therefore impossible that any one, whose ideas of right and wrong are not perverted by the narrowest views and the most selfish considerations, can be found to defend.

If then the Colonial proprietors be aware of their own true interest, they will anticipate the important change which must take place, and substitute for the compulsory labour of slaves, an efficient system of free labour; and the sooner this could be accomplished, the more desirable would it be for all the parties concerned. But, unfortunately, so important a change in the condition of so great a number of human beings, cannot be instantaneously accomplished.

The system of slavery has been too long continued, and its devoted objects have been degraded too low in the scale of humanity, to allow it to be supposed that the act of a moment can repair the injuries and abuses of ages, or that deep founded habits and inveterate prejudices can be removed, without the adoption of such measures as are indispensably requisite for that purpose. With every disposition on the part of the Colonial proprietors to adopt a different system, how would it be possible to accomplish it without some necessary precautions, some deliberate and gradual process, which should progressively give to the slave the feeling of independence, without the danger of licentiousness; and enable him to perceive, that the necessity of providing for his own subsistence, though less degrading, is not less imperative, than that under which he had before been compelled to return to his daily task.

Although little has hitherto been said of the particular mode in which this great object might be most safely and beneficially accomplished, yet it has not wholly escaped the notice of the advocates for the abolition of slavery. So long ago as the year 1788, a plan was published, by another member of this Society, for the gradual improvement in the condition of the slaves in the British Colonies, and the consequent termination of the trade for slaves to Africa.\*—By this plan it was proposed to improve the personal rights of the slaves—to establish Courts of Judicature, independent of merchants or planters—to introduce the laws of England, particularly trial by jury—to punish the wilful murder of a slave by death, which was not then generally the case—to render the testimony of a slave, evidence, to go to the consideration of a jury—to protect

---

\* “A general view of the African Slave Trade, demonstrating its injustice and impolicy, with hints towards a bill for its Abolition.” For R. Faulder, London.—1788.

them from wanton and illegal punishment—to enable them to retain property by law, to encourage them to marry, and to grant them exemptions and privileges in proportion to the number of children brought up—to allow them to work or to hire themselves out on the days of exemption—to provide for their religious instruction and attendance on divine worship, and to allow them to purchase their freedom on certain terms; with such other regulations as seemed necessary to raise them in the scale of society, preparatory to their final emancipation. In addition to these internal regulations, the due attention of the proprietors to the increase and improvement of their slave population, was proposed to be promoted by a duty upon every slave imported, which would be increased at different periods till the year 1800, when it was proposed entirely to prohibit the trade.

Had this or any plan of a similar nature been carried into effect, the consequence would have been, that an immediate alteration would have taken place in the condition of the slave, which, by a gradual process, would have rendered him capable of still higher improvement; that seven years before the declared abolition of the slave-trade by the British Legislature, that trade would have been effectually abolished, and the Colonies would at this day have been able to resist the competition of any other part of the world; whilst, with the continuance of slavery, they are now in a much more unfavourable state than when such publication took place.

Whether it may be thought proper to resort to these or similar measures, for gradually relaxing the bonds of slavery, and giving to its unfortunate victims the rank and feelings of human beings, it must rest with the Legislature of Great Britain, and the prudence and good sense of the Colonial proprietors, to determine. That since the

publication of the tract last mentioned, many instances have occurred of the manumission of slaves, some of them on an extensive scale, and with acknowledged advantage to their former owners, is certain; nor is it improbable that measures might be adopted which might render such result general, within a much shorter time than that before mentioned. To contribute, as far as its efforts can be rendered available, towards the immediate mitigation of the evils attendant on slavery, and to obtain its entire abolition, as soon as it can be accomplished by all reasonable, proper, and effectual means, is the express object of this Society; and its resolution is formed, not to desist till such object be accomplished.

*Resolved,*

That this Society will be happy to co-operate with the Societies now formed in LONDON, PARIS, and the UNITED STATES of America, or that may be formed elsewhere, for promoting the objects which this Society has in view; and to correspond with them on all subjects connected therewith.

WILLIAM ROSCOE,  
*President.*

ISAAC HODGSON,  
*Secretary.*